New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1952

Volume XIII, Number 22 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 10, 1952

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Theatre Openings

"H.M.S. Pinafore" "Trial by Jury"
"The Climate of Eden" "The Deep Blue Sea"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 10, 1952*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Climate of Eden"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 7, 1952

'The Climate of Eden'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE ways of love are strange, but in the theater they may be getting stranger than is strictly necessary. We have been up to our ears this season in characters who don't know what to do with all the love that is thrown at them—who have, in fact, a tendency to become morbid and homicidal at the faintest suggestion of devotion from the opposite sex—and Moss Hart has brought us still another such in "The Climate of Eden."

The earnestly written and brilliantly mounted play which came to the Martin Beck Thursday night has been adapted from a novel by Edgar Mittelholzer called "Shadows Move Among Them." Into a jungle paradise inhabited by a highly unconventional minister of religion and his attractive, equally unconventional brood comes a tense young man from the cities. The fourteen-year-old of the family quickly spots him as a sort of schizophrenic, a "shadow" rather than a man, and in her impertinent, straight-forward way, draws from him the information that he has loathed his loving wife, planned to kill her, and only been prevented by her accidental drowning.

As the play moves forward, this shattered central figure at first stubbornly resists, then finally succumbs to, the cleansing influences of the idyllic life around him—at the same time that his bitter and cynical presence is beginning to do its own damage to these happy innocents. The play means, I gather, to contrast the intolerable tensions of modern urban life with the Rousseau-like simplicity of this whimsical Eden.

If Mr. Hart's conscientious exploration of this spiritual and emotional battle is curiously unmoving, it may be because he has sentimentalized the paradise and been much too garish about the emotional plight of his sophisticate. The tragic young man is so flagrantly deep in neurosis—he is ready to put a razor to the throat of the minister's daughter who is falling in love with him—that he ceases to be representative, or even entirely intelligible. And the palm-drenched utopia is drawn with the literary innocence of the eighteenth century. Here all and sundry bathe happily in the nude, take casual lovers at tender ages, smoke in church, and chant "I believe in what I can sense . . . in this life is the kingdom of heaven."

Actually, this delicious existence in the remote fastnesses of British Guiana is never made quite as appealing as it may sound. The characters talk rather too much, too selfconsciously, and too pompously about it for complete comfort. Though the production is staffed with a first-rate company, even that excellent actor John Cromwell is unable to make the father as charming as occasional lines tell us he is meant to be. And Lee Montague, as the troubled hero, remains a grim rather than a touching figure.

There are interesting performances, though. Rosemary Harris is lovely to look at and thoroughly winning as the minister's eldest, and 'altogether too normal," daughter. Isobel Elsom brings great dignity to the role of a tolerant mother.

And Penelope Munday is an entrancingly hoydenish ingenue. Cast as the impetuous, faintly 'queer' fourteen-year-old, Miss Munday is an enormous pleasure as she sits primly at a harmonium accompanying her father's reading of a mystery novel, as she combs her older sister's hair in the moonlight and muses about sex, and as she latches, with unholy glee, onto any and all reports having to do with rape, murder, or supernatural visitations.

Frederick Fox has designed a majestic jungle clearing, complete with a double-decker house, a native church, and enormous overshadowing palms. Jean Rosenthal has lighted it all beautifully. And Mr. Hart has directed his own play for, surely, its maximum theatrical effectiveness: the evening is thoroughly professional in the best sense of that word.

But the characters pass one another without quite touching. They are still too nearly shadows, and the conflicting worlds from which they come are never compellingly real.

"THE CLIMATE OF EDEN"

Play by Moss Hart, based on Edgar Mittelholzer's novel "Shadows Move Among Them"; staged by Mr. Hart; settings by Frederick Fox; lighting by Jean Rosenthal; costumes by Kenn Barr; incidental music by Trude Rittmann; presented by Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart at the Martin Beck Theatre, November 6, 1952. The cast:

Olivia.....Penelope Munday
Berton.....Ken Walken
Rev. Gerald Harmston.....John Cromwell
Mrs. Harmston...Isobel Elsom
Mabel.....Rosemary Harris
Garvey.....Ray Stricklyn
Gregory Hawke...Lee Montague
Logan.....Earle Hyman
Ellen.....Jane White
Howard.....Edward Hall
Robert.....Leon Moore
Mr. Buckingham..Leslie Barrie
Mrs. Buckingham.....Winnifred Cushing

New York Post

November 7, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Striking Drama of a Modern Eden

Moss Hart's new play, "The Climate of Eden," which opened at the Martin Beck last night, is its author's strangest and most curious work, and I think it represents a fascinating adventure in the theater. Based on the novel by Edgar Mittelholzer called "Shadows Move Among Them," it is an exotic exploit in both setting and conception, and it has some of the diffuseness and uncertainty characteristic of dramatized fiction, but, even though there are moments in which its points seem to me rather blurred, it is a striking, original and absorbing play, staged and acted with force and distinction.

All that I know about Mr. Mittelholzer's novel is that it was highly admired by a number of the book reviewers, but it is clear that Mr. Hart set himself a difficult and demanding task when he decided to dramatize it. As it reaches the stage, "The Climate of Eden" still retains signs that it was not meant to fit comfortably within the limiting confines of the stage, and the playwright has certainly not succeeded in making it neat and efficient in theatrical terms. But I think he has done something better than that. He has transformed it into a theatrical work that is provocative in ideas, insight and imagination.

Eden in Guiana

Although its setting of an English missionary colony in the jungles of British Guiana is picturesque and colorful, the play by no means goes in for exotic atmosphere for its own sake. The lushness of its background is, in truth, merely symbolic of the spirit of what it has to say. For the family of the Reverend Gerald Harmston, the idealistic missionary, is certainly not the routine missionary family of fiction or the theater, nor is the Reverend Harmston a conventional example of the preacher who carries the gospel to far places. He is a man who has actually built an Eden of his own in the torrid jungles of South America.

It is a strange, uninhibited, entirely unconventional Eden that he has constructed, just as his religious services are assurely not those of convenional religion. He and his wife and his children are free and uninhibited spirits, and the religion he preaches is one of freedom, dreams, frank illusions and imagination, with a fine scorn of literalness about it. I suspect that the playwright and, possibly, the novelist are not very explicit concerning Mr. Harmston's faith, but the church service that is offered in one scene is made to seem a very appealing one. The play, however, is happily not concerned with providing a message for the world.

Neurotic Serpent

Anyway, Mr. Hart's Eden has a serpent of its own. He is a strange, tormented, half-mad young man, who is torn by the fear that he has driven his wife to her death, and it is one of the ironical points of the play that this representative of the neurotic confusions of contemporary civilization is at first considerably shocked by the moral laxity of the colony in which he finds himself. How he is saved from his own terrors by the two daughters of the missionary, the younger of whom bears a striking resemblance to the girl in "The Member of the Wedding," is the crux of the tale, and it very rarely ceases to be arresting.

Against a handsome and complex setting imaginatively designed by Frederick Fox, Mr. Hart has staged his exotic, ironical story with his characteristic skill, and the playing is admirable. Two young English actresses, Penelope Munday, as the younger daughter, and Rosemary Harris, as the older one, offer remarkably sensitive and lovely performances, and John Cromwell, always a fine actor, is brilliantly skillful as the missionary. There are, in addition, first-rate and completely credible portrayals by Lee Montague, a British newcomer, as the self-tortured interloper, and Isobel Elsom, as the mother, and the minor roles are exactly as they should be. "The Climate of Eden" has ideas and imagination.

The New York Times

November 7, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Taking leave at least for the moment from boisterous comedy, Moss Hart has written a serious play with a mystic mood, "The Climate of Eden," which opened at the Martin Beck last evening. It is dramatized from Edgar Mittelholzer's "Shadows Move Among Them," an exotic novel about British Guiana.

Since Mr. Mittelholzer's novel is written in an elusive style, it does not translate into play form easily. In the final analysis it must no doubt be said that Mr. Hart has not succeeded. For "The Climate of Eden" is uneven; it is compounded of scenes that do not always blend, and it lacks a kind of eerie eloquence that might set the whole work tingling.

But those unpleasant comments are put down here grudgingly. For "The Climate of Eden" includes a number of tender and touching scenes and some disarming characters who have not yet caught the cynicism of the world, and parts of it describe a religious sect based on a whimsical though admirable vision of the world.

* * *

Like the novel, this is the story of a young man in a psychotic frame of mind who visits a family of missionaries in the British Guiana jungle. Their leader is an enlightened fanatic who believes in God, nature, culture and freedom. The Reverend Gerrald is a calm, attractive man of God, who has not lost his sense of humor; and his family of two daughters, two sons and a wife is alive, original and winning.

If "The Climate of Eden" were concerned primarily with the family and the colony of happy natives, it probably would be irresistible. For the older daughter represents a romantic simplicity that is rare, both in the writing and in the soft, luminous acting of Rosemary Harris. And the precocious, overwrought younger daughter is a constant nymph whose prattle and preternatural insight are amusing and poignant. Looking a little like "The Member of the Wedding," Penelope Munday plays the part with lyrical intensity.

The impromptu family scenes acted by these girls are fresh and lovely. And the scene representing a religious service in the jungle is exalting. John Cromwell, dressed in a flowing, blue robe, presides over the meeting as the pastor, and imparts to it a grave, relaxed sincerity that conveys the theme of the play admirably. The service is good. The communicants are good; the scriptures are read beautifully and the music is inspiring.

These are the most genuine elements in the play. But the technique of portraying the goodness of life in the colony involves, by way of contrast, the character of the psychotic who is being healed. No doubt it is necessary to have him in the play, as he was in the novel. But he is hardly more than a distasteful and uncommunicative case history. Like Mittelholzer, Mr. Hart studies him like a psychiatrist; and Lee Montague plays him with a formal affability that is cold and shallow. He is constantly interrupting the description of an enchanting corner of the jungle.

Sick people do not have much to contribute to the spiritual health of any community. The sick person in "The Climate of Eden" overweighs the play, throws the theme out of focus and accounts for most of the languid interludes when the drama is at loose ends. If a hasty analysis is not too wide of the mark, the character of Gregory Hawke and the unresolved acting of Mr. Montague stand between Mr. Hart and a fine drama.

As his own director, Mr. Hart has put together an entrancing production. Frederick Fox's forest setting, showing the missionary's house and the chapel, is a superb piece of design and painting; and Jean Rosenthal's lighting brings the forest alive.

Life moves lightly through this luxuriant opening in the jungle, sweetened by Isobel Elsom's patient acting as the wife and mother, enlivened by the mercurial caprices of Miss Munday's endearing sprite and steadied by Mr. Cromwell's earnest good humor. There is a lot that is pure and moving in Mr. Hart's idyll—enough for a theatregoer to wish that all of it were on the high artistic level of the best scenes in it.

Daily Mirror

November 7, 1952

'Climate of Eden' Gives Reviewer Chills

By ROBERT COLEMAN

We haven't read Edgar Mittelholzer's novel, "Shadows Move Among Them." Perhaps it is fascinating. That we don't know. But we do know that a Moss Hart dramatization, called "The Climate of Eden," is more irritating than fascinating. The new arrival, which Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart brought to the Martin Beck Theatre last evening, could be titled, "Alice in Horrorland."

"The Climate of Eden" has to do with a missionary in the jungle of British Guiana with some peculiar ideas. He believes in mixed nude bathing, free love, birth control, the telling of ghost stories to attract parishioners to Wednesday evening meetings, and smoking in church among other things. He considers those abnormal who think the members of his family and flock abnormal.

A schizophrenic cousin with a murder complex comes to the colony for a visit. He eventually enters on a trial marriage with the elder and lusher daughter of the minister. The younger daughter, addicted to macabre pranks, is jealous of the relationship, and through her jealousy comes to a realization that what she considers an idyllic status quo must inevitably come to an end.

The Reverend Harmston's family is reminiscent of the Sanger clan in "The Constant Nymph" because of its unconventional attitude. But where the latter relied upon eccentric charm, the former depends upon shock to achieve its effects. In our opinion, the Harmstons are a rather repulsive lot.

John Cromwell and Isobel Elsom, admirable players both, seem ill at ease as the Reverend and Mrs. Harmston. Lee Montague offers some tense, electrifying moments as the psychopathic visitor. Rosemary Harris etches the elder sister with a sensitive dramatic touch. Penelope Munday, who looks something like Audrey Hepburn, sends shivers up your spine as the weird younger daughter. Her high-pitched, shrill voice rasps the nerves.

Ken Walken, Ray Stricklyn, Earle Hyman, Jane White, Edward Hall and Leon Moore do credit to other roles.

Frederick Fox has designed a wonderfully atmospheric setting, which Jean Rosenthal has lighted to advantage. Author Hart has directed his opus with a skillful and sure hand.

It may be "The Climate of Eden" for Hart and the Harmstons, but it was Hades for us. Self-conscious sex can be pretty boring.

DAILY NEWS

November 7, 1952

'The Climate of Eden' an Unusual, Fascinating and Beautiful Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

From a novel by Edgar Mittelholzer titled "Shadows Move Among Them" Moss Hart has made a play—an eerie, fascinating, lovely play—called "The Climate of Eden." Last evening at the Martin Beck Theatre it was given a glowing performance, a beautiful performance, by John Cromwell, Penelope Munday and a splendid large company.

Hart had shown great ingenuity and theatrical craftsmanship in writing and staging "The Climate of Eden," but these are not his finest accomplishments; his real achievement is making this drama a thing of warmth and loving insight. All his players are up to this high mark, and Miss Munday gives a remarkable performance as a 14-year-old who is part child, part woman and part elf.

This climate of Eden of which Mittelholzer and Hart have written is the steaming jungle climate of British Guiana. Here Cromwell has settled as a strange kind of missionary. The faith that he has evolved is godly and Christian enough, but more individual than churchly. It is, as the missionary puts it, an attitude toward life. He includes the Bible, music and such ordinary pleasures as smoking in church in this attitude toward life, and there is no more heartfelt benediction than his wish that his flock may enjoy "many happy thoughts and fancies."

Stranger Arrives.

The flock includes his family, — wife, two sons, two daughters — and the British Guiana natives. It is a happy flock living in a spirit of freedom of mind and body, and respect for the individual. To this jungle group comes a man who is insane and sick — a man who is haunted by the ghost of a wife who is dead but for whom his

hatred still burns.

Part of the play is about what happens to this man (very interestingly portrayed by Lee Montague) — but only part, for "The Climate of Eden" goes deeply into the lives and hungering souls of many people. One of them is the young girl, a kind of jungle Frankie Addams. She is skinny, pale, quite unkempt, uncannily sharp of mind and something of a witch, given to strange forebodings and impulsive acts. She does not realize that her trouble is that she is taking leave of her precious childhood and is about to become a new person who is now a total stranger to her.

Some Moving Scenes.

Another of the people in this unusual play is the girl's elder sister, played simply and beautifully by Rosemary Harris, who comes to love the man from the outside world. Others of interest are the missionary's wife (Isobel Elsom), who has adjusted herself to her husband's individualistic philosophy, and a young lad (Ken Walken) who can express his great devotion only by being ferocious.

They all are interesting as they move in and out of Frederick Fox's picturesque two-level set, which is of a house and a church deep in the brooding jungle. There are many scenes of extraordinary impact, the two most moving of which, to me, are Miss Harris' offer of love to the haunted stranger and Cromwell's infinitely wise and compassionate talk to a small daughter who has suddenly found life frightening. Cromwell is an actor of strength, humor and gentleness.

This morning I offer my thanks to everybody in a fine company, and thanks most of all to Moss Hart for an unusual and emotionally satisfying drama.

Journal American

November 7, 1952

Too Many Plots Spoil the Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

MOSS HART, with an assist from a novel by Edgar Mittelholzer, has come up with a new play called "The Climate Of Eden" which was opened for inspection at the Martin Beck Theatre last night.

It is written with taste and intelligence; there are moments of high humor and pathos and the entire atmosphere is pervaded with gentle philosophy; there are two resounding performances by John Cromwell and Penelope Munday. But I thought the story became hopelessly cluttered early in the first half and never quite straightened itself out until the final whistle blew.

This may be the fault of Mr. Mittelholzer's novel. "Shadows Move Among Them," but in any case it struck me that Mr. Hart was determined to get too many plots into one perimeter.

Delectable Dish

The central story concerns a young man who arrives in the jungles of British Guiana to visit a relative who happens to be a most unorthodox missionary; he preaches his own religion to the natives, a somewhat amoral philosophy which also prevails in his family.

His eldest daughter, a delectable dish, falls in love with the visitor immediately, only to discovery that he is suffering from schizophrenia and is apt to cut her throat at any odd moment.

There is no use giving you more details of how all this is finally resolved, but the fact is that much of it seemed entirely superfluous.

The story of the schizophrenic and the girl would appear to be enough for one solid play in itself; or the delightful tale of the off-beat missionary and his flock, and I haven't even told you about a sub-scenario running through the whole evening, the drama of the younger sister who also is in love with the same man.

This could easily be a female "Bernardine," all about the anguish and frustration of girlish adolescence.

To get these dozen-odd plots into one evening the producers or maybe Mr. Hart, or both, have chosen to do it in one set—the missionary's two-story house and the church next door. The result is that the stage is almost as cluttered as the plot, and much of the action is played on the second floor.

Penelope Hailed

As someone complained, suffering from a slight crick in the neck, it was fortunate for the audience that the missionary couldn't afford a third story.

Having disposed of the knocks it must be added, as boosts, that the performance of Miss Munday, as the adolescent sister, is one of the brightest delineations of the season; John Cromwell is, as always, superbly sure and persuasive in the role of the unconventional parson; Rosemary Harris is most decorative and capable as the older sister, and Lee Montague succeeded beyond the call of duty in switching from charm to schizophrenia and back again.

Moss Hart is adept at characterization and long on humor —there are many warm and witty lines which must be his alone. But I wish next time he would only give us one play per evening.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 7, 1952

Moss Hart Explores 'Climate of Eden'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Although Moss Hart has done a great deal of effective work in highlighting and intensifying "The Climate of Eden," the play still suffers from the major faults of the book from which it was taken.

Eden is a section of upriver British Guiana where a certain Reverend has brought his family to raise them by his own somewhat unorthodox philosophy. A mentally unstable young man arrives to recuperate, and the story tells of his effect on the Reverend's two daughters, one adolescent and the other most marriageable.

Play Spreads Thin.

The little jungle group is autocratically run. The fact that its "essence is evasion" instead of civilization's "obsession with conclusions," and other smatterings of explanation make it sound different without making it intriguing.

The play spreads thin as the book did, because it never quite decides whether to focus on the exotic society, the neurotic visitor, the love story or the maturing child. As it turns out the love story is the most interesting and convincing of these elements, but the little girl gets the last word.

These people believe vaguely in psychic phenomena, and the children's precocity and earthiness clearly derive from their proximity to raw, ageless nature.

The evening's chief glow for this onlooker came from the presence in the cast of a young English actress who has never played in London, much less Broadway, before, named Rosemary Harris. She is the Reverend's older daughter, whose faith cures the spirit of the visitor.

She seems to be so natural an actress that you are never conscious of her performing. And certainly her beauty, warmth and composure are rare.

Lee Montague holds remarkable sympathy with the peculiar role of the rocky-minded visitor. His seizure and attempt at murder is glassy-eyed, but his emotional collapse at the child's abominable trick is most effective.

Monstrous Child.

Penelope Munday is surely striking as the monstrous juvenile who is learning about love and jealousy while she indulges her wild imagination. The deliberately hiked-up young pitch of her voice is monotonous. Miss Munday would be more impressive if we did not have the dazzling memory of Julie Harris playing so similar a situation in "Member of the Wedding" still vividly in mind.

John Cromwell is solid and warm as the Reverend, but the role has not many facets in its present form. Isobel Elsom has one cool and lovely scene as she tries to discover whether her daughter is having an affair with the visitor.

Ken Walken creates some fine brief moments of tension as the younger son and Jane White makes a lot of one hysterical episode.

The play is enchanting often, but usually lacks real magnetism. Basically its trouble is that the people are not important in themselves, and serve no formidable parallel to the lives of the spectators.

"The Deep Blue Sea"

Journal American
November 6, 1952

Margaret Sullavan Back in Triumph!

By JOHN McCLAIN

AFTER an eight-year absence, Margaret Sullavan returned to the New York stage last night and scored a tumultuous triumph in "The Deep Blue Sea," the new Terence Rattigan drama which was unveiled at the Morosco Theatre.

This British import, a current success in London, offers a more challenging and profound role than those usually associated with her, and in her mastery of the central character one had the conviction that she indeed reached full maturity as an actress of depth and stature. For there are times when the momentum of the play threatens to bog down in static repetition; and it is then that she keeps it up to pitch through sheer drive and determination.

In all this she is aided immeasurably by the services of Alan Webb and Herbert Berghof. There are certain reservations here about James Hanley—not regarding his ability as an actor, which is self-evident, but rather his assignment as the lover.

It seemed to me that the primary situation would have been improved by casting somebody in his part who bore the more unmistakeable marks of an "homme fatal."

Ageless Theme

There are also reservations about Mr. Rattigan's play (however few will be available at the box office for months to come).

He has as his theme an ageless and previously - explored problem concerning a woman who has more love to offer than either her husband or the lover to whom she flees can handle. For three acts the futility of this status is tossed in the air, beaten against the walls and belted back and forth by all concerned until no solution seems possible.

And at the end of all this, with suicide only a few minutes around the corner, Final Enlightenment comes in the form of a disappointingly simple diatribe.

Despite this over-and underemphasis of a rather pedestrian cause of self-destruction, the author has conceived his characters with care and understanding and the construction of the drama is, for a change, a smooth and professional process.

Fine Humor

His scenes are constructed with substance, his people speak and behave within the limits of plausible conduct. There are fine touches of humor: the sequence in which the lover gets his old chum from the RAF to come around and share a few drinks while they settle his personal score; the episode in which young John Merivale offers the sage advice of merely going away for a few weeks and "clearing the head"; the scene in which Alan Webb tries, ineffectually and for the final time, to win her back.

But the honors for the evening are immeasurably Miss Sullavan's. She succeeds in bringing credence to this role of a woman driven to disaster through unrequited love and she keeps it alive even during the last moments of the final act, after the talk has become interminable.

"The Deep Blue Sea" may not be Mr. Rattigan's best play—but it is certainly Miss Sullavan's.

"THE DEEP BLUE SEA"

Play by Terence Rattigan; staged by Frith Banbury; setting by Charles Elson; presented by Alfred de Liagre Jr. and John C. Wilson at the Morosco Theatre, November 5, 1952. The cast:

Hester Collyer.....Margaret Sullavan
Mrs. Elton.....Betty Sinclair
Philip Welch.....John Merivale
Ann Welch.....Stella Andrew
Mr. Miller.....Herbert Berghof
William Colyer.....Alan Webb
Frederick Page...James Hanley
Jackie Jackson...Felix Deebank

New York Post
November 6, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Terence Rattigan's Newest Drama

Terence Rattigan's newest play, "The Deep Blue Sea," which opened at the Morosco Theater last night, is, until it comes rather apart in the third act, an expert example of slick-paper magazine fiction transferred to the medium of the drama. It is, I believe, the sort of stage work that is known in the trade as a "woman's show," and, with such an expert and popular actress as Margaret Sullavan in the leading role, it should have an excellent head start toward box-office success. Nevertheless, although it begins with vast effectiveness and continues arrestingly for a large part of the way, I found its final impact rather disappointing.

In London last summer, it seemed to me one of the most skillfully acted plays, in all of its roles, that I have ever seen. It is fairly well played in the local production, also, but, since "The Deep Blue Sea" doesn't quite provide the theatrical excitement and satisfaction here that it did in England, I imagine that the current performances, as competent as they are, must bear some of the responsibility. Mr. Rattigan's drama, which was fabricated rather than written and has dexterity rather than creative distinction, is, of course, likewise to blame, but the other factors shouldn't be overlooked.

Runaway Wife

Before trying to tell why I was more than a little disappointed in the final quality of the narrative at the Morosco, let me describe briefly what it is about. It is the melancholy story of a woman of mature years who has left her devoted, wealthy, sympathetic husband to go off with a crude and unintentionally selfish ex-R.A.F. pilot and who, just as the play opens, has tried to commit suicide because she sees that her lover is ceasing to care for her. Although the husband wants to take her back and the young aviator is frankly through with her, she refuses to return to domesticity, and Mr. Rattigan tries to explain why.

As everyone knows, Miss Sullavan is an extremely competent actress and she brings all of her charm and resource to the role of the unhappy runaway. I think the playwright handicaps her by making his heroine the least interesting person in his drama, but it is certainly a part which gives a fine opportunity to demonstrate technical skill, and Miss Sullavan has the guile and the suggestion of aristocracy necessary to the characterization. But the woman she is playing is, according to the text, older, more faded and perhaps less attractive than the star makes her, which is, indeed, a great part of her tragedy.

Matters of Age

As it is currently played, a young and handsome woman has deserted her rather elderly husband to go off with a youth of apparently about her own age. Yet the play, as I see it, is intended to deal with a husband and wife of approximately the same age group, with the lover a considerably younger fellow. My impression is that this at once changes the quality of the Rattigan drama, and by no means to its advantage. In addition, the flier, as played by James Hanley, is an oddly petulant and unpleasant scoundrel instead of the lost, rootless and troubled young man that the brilliant Kenneth More made him in London.

The conflict between the two, as the play seems to me, is between a woman who loves too much, although she doesn't want to, and a man who loves too little and is a bit disturbed by it. I thought there was too little of this suggestion in the current performance. Then, too, while Alan Webb, who plays the husband, is a fine actor, he does not quite manage to indicate the proper combination of inner warmth and outer stuffiness inherent in the role. Finally, the complex and fascinating part of an enigmatic German doctor, who has lost his license and fallen on evil days, is somewhat conventionally played by Herbert Berghof. "The Deep Blue Sea," I fear, just misses.

The New York Times

November 6, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Thanks to Terence Rattigan, Margaret Sullavan has an eminently actable part in "The Deep Blue Sea," which opened at the Morosco last evening. She gives the performance of her career. Something of the same sort could be said for all the parts, and perhaps for the other actors, too.

For Mr. Rattigan, British author of "The Winslow Boy" and "O Mistress Mine," is an instinctive theatre writer, whether he has something to say or not. "The Deep Blue Sea," still current in London, is the deeply emotional drama of a complicated, highly civilized woman who has fallen desperately in love with a simple young bounder who is not capable of profound love.

* * *

The affair is monstrously uneven. She has abandoned a devoted husband suitable to a woman of her upbringing; and he has abandoned the irresponsible life that suits him perfectly. If she were sensible, she would give up her lover and return to the sort of life she is fitted for. But it is Mr. Rattigan's contention that reasonable solutions do not apply, that the two lovers must separate and that she must painfully create a life of her own—a life without hope or happiness.

If you believe in the validity of this shattering, unequal love between two people who destroy each other "The Deep Blue Sea" will be an overwhelming drama. But if, like this reviewer, you believe it reluctantly, Mr. Rattigan's play will seem made-to-order, like a servant girl's romance—rather trite under all the surface bravura, a little too pat to be a work of art. Mr. Rattigan has enormous facility, but not much originality or imagination; and his dramatic silences can make some pretty hackneyed noises.

* * *

In the circumstances we shall have to be content with the notable theatricalism of the occasion—the neat, understated direction of Frith Banbury, the morose, squalid setting by Charles Elson, the perfect casting all through the production. As the unhappy lady, Miss Sullavan gives a powerful, vivid performance. The emotions of the part are probably raw. But Miss Sullavan gives them distinction and a kind of terrible sincerity by the simplicity, directness and strength of her acting.

James Hanley is superb as the bounder. His acting has distinction, too. For beyond the selfishness and sulkiness of the character he suggests the bewilderment of a young man who is honestly in love but knows his limitations as a suitor. The character is cheap, but Mr. Hanley knows that there is also something sensitive at the heart of it.

As the loyal husband of a woman who has left him, Alan Webb has a rather pompous, obtuse part to play. As usual, he acts it with taste and intelligence, making something notable out of his supercilious exits. In the meagerly written part of an unlicensed physician, Herbert Berghof, achieves considerable force of character by the harsh economy of his acting. John Merivale contributes one little gem of a scene as a pious, condescending neighbor who thinks he knows all about life.

Betty Sinclair as a bustling friendly landlady; Felix Deebank as a reformed rounder with an uncertain sense of amenities; Stella Andrew as an apprehensive young wife from upstairs in the roominghouse—all acquit themselves admirably. For they are well cast and directed, and Mr. Rattigan has written the parts sagaciously. Too sagaciously perhaps: "The Deep Blue Sea" is too slick and thin to have any significance beyond the acted performance.

Daily Mirror

November 6, 1952

Sullavan Breathes Fire In 'The Deep Blue Sea'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Travelers returning from England have been singing the praises of Terence Rattigan's "The Deep Blue Sea." So when Alfred de Liagre, Jr. and John C. Wilson, two of our most distinguished producers, joined hands to present the tragi-comedy over here, it went on the theatrical agenda as an event. A sort of super-special event, since they had persuaded Margaret Sullavan to star in the American replica.

The new arrival's bow at the Morosco Theatre last evening was an event, all right. The Sullavan, De Liagre and Wilson followings —and they're quite smart—were out in full force, in minks and ermines and top hats. But the occasion had some disappointments, along with many rewards, for this aisle sitter.

You've heard of being between the devil and the deep blue sea. Well, that's where Hester Collyer was. She had left a well-meaning, capable but dull solicitor husband to live with a well-meaning, ineffectual, exciting ex-Air Force hero. The real trouble was that she couldn't live happily with the flier, and was miserable without him.

So miserable that she attempted suicide. This shocked her too-casual affinity into agreeing to take on a dangerous test-pilot job in South America. Left alone, Hester had to develop standards, new respect for herself, in order to survive. She was helped by a disbarred doctor who, himself, had faced the depths and successfully came back from them.

It's a play that calls for vibrant, virtuoso acting. The writing isn't deep enough for real tragedy, and it's much too deep for superficial comedy. It requires superlative, sensitive, evocative direction, and this it doesn't always get from Frith Banbury. He, like so many British directors, is apt to stage emotional scenes with the characters back to back rather than face to face, as we prefer it over here. And he's inclined to mistake stiffness for reticence and decent feeling.

Miss Sullavan is essentially a vital, irresistible projector of emotions, but her talents are kept under wraps for much of the evening. Only in the last act is she allowed to rise fully to the demands of Rattigan's dialogue and situations. And in this stanza, she, the deserted one, and Herbert Berghof, as the philosophic ex-doctor reduced to book-making, are triumphant. This is exciting, moving drama.

Alan Webb happens to be one of our favorite actors, but, as the sympathetic husband, he is much too wooden, too lifeless—thanks to Banbury's coaching. James Hanley is excellent as the flier paramour.

Make no mistake about it, Miss Sullavan is a box-office magnet. Long lines have been forming at the Morosco for tickets. She's in a hit. We suspect it will be a more rewarding hit by the time you see it.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 6, 1952

Margaret Sullavan And 'Deep Blue Sea'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Shortly before the final curtain of "The Deep Blue Sea," Margaret Sullavan has a few superb moments as a woman who has been thoroughly lost, showing promise of finding herself again.

As a consistent three-handkerchief man wherever Miss Sullavan has previously been concerned, it is regrettable to report that for the earlier four-fifths of the new drama, the star left this reporter untouched and unconvinced. There are at least two clear reasons for this lamentable fact, one having to do with the nature of the play, and the other, coincidentally, with Miss Sullavan's acting personality.

If Terence Rattigan had striven to make things tough for his leading lady, he could not have done better. This account of an English gentlewoman's haunting adoration for an ordinary man who breaks her heart, is essentially on one key. There are variations to the hopelessness of the obsession, but it starts with suicide, and ends just one step removed from the same place.

Tortured Gallantry.

The principal character is consistently captured by just that same tortured gallantry that Miss Sullavan is so well known for, from the days of her picture debut in "Only Yesterday" on. There are just no ways left for her to convey this mood, that are not entirely familiar.

The woman here is the wife of a judge, and has run off with an ex-test pilot, her junior, who has neither character nor ambition. He loves her, as much as he is capable of loving anyone, but is smothered by her possessiveness and physical demands.

Miss Sullavan is utterly successful at suggesting the present pathos of the woman, but never quite echoes the formality of her previous life, with which she must have contended successfully, if

there is to be any real tragedy.

Webb Dominates Stage.

Alan Webb is strikingly successful as the judge, who is willing and anxious to take back his erring wife, despite her year-long, open infidelity. In what should be one of the star's most touching scenes, where she explains her first meeting with her lover, Webb dominates the stage with his absolutely immobile concentration on the character's intense agony.

James Hanley, familiar from British films, makes a provocative Broadway debut as the flyer. He suggests the start of corpulence, the laziness and the avid relaxation of a man whose growth stopped with the Battle of Britain. Somewhere along the line, though, through acting or direction, he neglects the hint of vitality that could alone convince the onlooker of physical attraction on which the entire situation must depend. His languor makes Miss Sullavan the aggressor, which is not a touching compliment of such an obsession.

Herbert Berghoff has what seems to me his most successful role on the local stage, in the grim, unofficial medico, who has learned to live beyond hope. His suggestion of silent, troubled depths is most convincing.

Betty Sinclair is quite real as a concerned landlady, and Stella Andrew and John Merivale do well by a nosey young couple who start all the heroine's difficulties.

I could use a more moving spark for the woman's moral regeneration, than the misty talk about life beyond hope. The present recipe of "Deep Blue Sea" fails to jell. It may be that Mr. Rattigan has written too psychological a play about a physiological situation. Or the work may simply not challenge the star to originality enough.

The play is theatrical in the best sense, with ominous door knockings, dramatic confrontations, and perhaps a little too much letter writing. But in the end it is simply hard to care

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 6, 1952

'The Deep Blue Sea'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN "The Deep Blue Sea," which Alfred de Liagre and John C. Wilson brought to the Morosco Wednesday night, Margaret Sullavan plays a middle-aged woman racked to the point of suicide by the compulsive passion she feels for an extremely ordinary young man.

Hester Collyer has been the distinguished wife of a rising young barrister. But at the first chance brush with a handsome, hard-drinking, ne'er-do-well test pilot she has felt herself irretrievably lost. Though the two realize that they are "death for each other," they hurry off to a dingy backstairs existence.

Hester is neither deceived by the shabbiness of her new life nor by the shallowness of the man on whom she has so relentlessly fastened. Tormented by the double certainty that he is not worthy of her love and that he is soon bound to leave her, unable to respect her own role in the whole affair and unwilling to return to her groveling husband, she swallows down a bottle of aspirin and turns on the gas-grate in their little London flat.

How this honest but helpless victim of an emotional malaise is finally jolted into some semblance of dignity and into a responsible freedom of action is the burden of Terence Rattigan's restless, high-strung and not altogether convincing play.

What is finally lacking in Mr. Rattigan's probing, literate, and meticulously written case study is any real sense of the driving passion which sends three characters into anguished conflict all night long. Hester tells us, tremblingly, how she feels—but the sensual fire never becomes vivid, the intense and headlong urgency of her infatuation remains something described rather than shared.

Part of the difficulty is inherent in Mr. Rattigan's plotting. By the time we are convinced that Frederick Page is a heartless, jobless, and generally worthless playboy, we are at as much of a loss to understand Hester's plight as she is. And the author's tendency to characterize this not very bright and not very appealing gentleman in lightly comic terms—as in a scene in which he chatters amiably with a drinking companion about his love's attempted suicide—serves to increase our dismay but not our understanding.

But part of the difficulty is also in Miss Sullavan's playing. The actress, delicately fetching as before, does a dozen small things which illuminate the minor moods of the piece. The awkward shyness with which she withdraws her instinctively proferred hand from her former husband, her strained attempt to be gay when she is actually drained of all emotion, the apprehensive innocence with which she asks a question that is bound to provoke a devastating answer, are all revealing touches.

But they are all fragile touches. When the author demands the shamelessness of wanton surrender—as in a last-act scene in which Hester gives over all thought of saving face and crawlingly begs that her man return—Miss Sullavan's finely etched, minutely detailed scale is no longer adequate. When the girl must cry out brazenly, Miss Sullavan's tone is still small, still faintly lyrical, and the depths of Hester's despair are never fully sounded.

Alan Webb makes the well meaning but eternally stodgy husband a sympathetic figure. Herbert Berghof gives a strikingly forceful performance as one of those Ibsenish neighbors who serve as a sort of conscience to the other characters, and James Hanley is believably boorish as the paramour who does not quite understand the havoc he has wrought. Betty Sinclair, John Merivale and Stella Andrew do nicely with lesser roles.

The new play at the Morosco traps its heroine between the devil and the deep blue sea. But the devil never quite comes to life.

DAILY NEWS

November 6, 1952

Margaret Sullavan Weeps, Loves In a Sudsy Drama, 'Deep Blue Sea'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Deeming it part of my job to behave well at the theatre, I never talk back to actors. Didn't even warn Leo Carroll not to forget his hat in "Angel Street." Last evening, in the very last moment of "The Deep Blue Sea" at the Morosco Theatre, I managed to quell a mad and churlish impulse to cry out at Margaret Sullavan, "Don't light it!" I wanted her to put herself out of my misery.

The circumstances of "The Deep Blue Sea" are these: In the beginning, Miss Sullavan is lying unconscious before a grate whose gas has been turned on. She wanted to do herself in because her boy friend forgot her birthday, but is saved because she forgot to put a shilling in the meter. (The scene is a London flat.) Along toward the end, after a lot of noble anguish—by now her boy friend has left her, saying "We are death to each other"—she turns on the gas again, this time with a shilling in the meter, but an unfrocked doctor rescues her. This fellow gives her a good talking-to, persuading her that she should go on living and attend art school. So, the third time she turns on the gas she lights the grate because she's cold. Pity, rather.

Oh, How She Can Love.

"The Deep Blue Sea" is by Terence Rattigan. It is a soap opera about hopeless love. Perhaps it is what is called a woman's play, and if so, some woman should be writing this notice instead of me—for I found it unworthy of the excellent acting which has been bestowed upon it by Miss Sullavan, the girl with the built-in sob, and such gentlemen as Alan Webb, James Hanley, Herbert Berghof, John Merivale and Felix Deebank.

Miss Sullavan has left her husband, Webb, who is a judge and owns a Rolls Royce, to play with an attractive young souse, Hanley. He is rather casual about love, being able to take it or leave it alone, but our Margaret is the passionate and possessive type and therefore has an awful time. She is lovely and persuasive in her anguish, but even her artistry can't make me believe the mechanics of the drama.

Alfred de Liagre Jr. and John C. Wilson have given "The Deep Blue Sea" a very stylish production and Frith Banbury has directed it quite gracefully. Webb gives another of his admirable performances, and I am particularly enthusiastic about the playing of Hanley, a newcomer to these shores, in the role of the casual lover. I'm sorry that the play itself is not my saucer of tea.

"H.M.S.Pinafore" & "Trial by Jury"

The New York Times

November 4, 1952

Chartock's Savoyards Present 'Trial by Jury' and 'Pinafore' at the Mark Hellinger

For the third offering of its limited engagement at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, the S. M. Chartock Gilbert and Sullivan Company is doing the double program of "Trial by Jury" and "H. M. S. Pinafore." And, whatever the cause—the martial beat of the "Pinafore" score or simply the tonic of passing time—the fact is that last night's performance was the best yet achieved by the newly organized congregation.

Although "Trial by Jury" is something of a trifle in the Gilbert and Sullivan portfolio, the troupe gave it a deserved and sprightly rendition. In the feature piece, it came through with a thoroughly spirited demonstration of its capabilities. Which, of course, not only is as it should be, but also is no mean feat in itself.

* * *

The operetta has been done almost to death by just about every high school glee club and dramatic society in the land. Yet, sung with relish by a vocally gifted aggregation, it can continue to retain much of the Gilbertian humor and the beauty of the Sullivan music.

Martyn Green was particularly impressive last night during the celebrated scene, wherein, as the First Lord of the Admiralty, he makes his regal entrance to announce just how he got to be the ruler of the Queen's Navee.

With a nice feeling for the mockery of the lyrics, in which Gilbert was taking a direct poke at the politics of his time, Mr. Green produced the required touch of satiric solemnity. His colleagues—the cousins, sisters and the aunts, gaily costumed by Peggy Morrison, as well as the crew—added color and vivacity to the stage to make the scene outstanding.

* * *

As Ralph Rackstraw, that poor fellow who happened to love a lass above his station, Robert Rounseville continues the fine work he has been doing for the company. His attractive tenor voice and his acting of the role combined to win him sympathy for his suit.

Matching his ardor and appeal was Lillian Murphy, a soprano who can sing with the sweet, emotional fervor of a lass somewhat perplexed by the problem of whether to defy her father and her position and go off with an ordinary sailor of the Queen.

There is, indeed, little left for a reviewer to report of Ella Halman who, with Mr. Green, left the famous D'Oyly Carte Opera Company to help Mr. Chartock set up the current company. She is Little Buttercup, naturally, and, naturally, fine. Joseph Macaulay gives the impression that no meaner, more villainous Dick Deadeye ever trod the boards of a British fighting ship, while Frank Rogier plays the role of the vessel's captain with a stuffed-shirt, effete quality that brings out the fun in the part, and his singing of "Fair Moon" was a pleasure.

Ralph Alswang's H.M.S. Pinafore is strictly utilitarian, for the purposes of touring, but, nevertheless, effective in this production, bright and airy as a seagoing ship should be.

In the pit, Lehman Engel's orchestra contributed its share toward making the evening a lively and happy one for all good Savoyards.

L. F.

DAILY NEWS

November 4, 1952

G & S Company Hits Its Stride With 'Pinafore'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

S. M. Chartock's Gilbert and Sullivan company at the Mark Hellinger Theatre is now, in its third bill, an excellent one. From the start it gave promise of being better than ordinary, and last evening, with its performance of "H.M.S. Pinafore" and "Trial by Jury," it really was much better than ordinary. It's a smooth-working team now, and its principals are as skillful as they are pleasant.

Last evening's performance of "Trial by Jury" was deft and tasteful, with Martyn Green full of good humor but not too full as the judge and with Earl Williams as an unusually ingratiating Defendant. The "Pinafore" performance was even better, and I was particularly delighted with Frank Rogier's acting and singing of the Captain.

"Pinafore" is a grand piece for a G & S company because it gives so many players a chance to score. There were beguiling performances last evening by Ella Halman as Buttercup, Joseph Macaulay as Dick Deadeye, Lillian Murphy as Josephine, Green — of course — as Sir Joseph Porter, Mary Roche as a cousin, Robert Eckles as Bill Bobstay and Robert Rounseville as Ralph Rackstraw. Rounseville seems to me the best all-round G & S tenor to come along in many years.

"H. M. S. PINAFORE" and "TRIAL BY JURY"

Operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan; costumes by Peggy Morrison; musical director Lehman Engel; settings by Ralph Alswang; staged and presented by S. M. Chartock at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, November 3, 1952. The casts:

"Trial by Jury"

Foreman of the Jury.....Robert Eckles
Associate.....Roger Franklin
Usher.....Radley Flynn
Defendant.....Earl William
The Learned Judge.....Martyn Green
Counsel for the Plaintiff....Frank Rogier
The Plaintiff...Audrey Dearden

"H.M.S. Pinafore"

Tommy Tucker..Bonnie Grevatt
Bill Bobstay.....Robert Eckles
Bob Beckett.....Radley Flynn
Little Buttercup...Ella Halman
Dick Deadeye...Joseph Macaulay
Ralph Rackstraw.....Robert Rounseville
Capt. Corcoran...Frank Rogier
Josephine.....Lillian Murphy
Sir Joseph Porter..Martyn Green
Hebe.....Mary Roche

It takes more than principals, though, to make an outfit of Savoyards. Also needed are a well-trained chorus, a good orchestra and a sensible musical director. Lehman Engel's musical direction is tasteful and intelligent, and the singers and musicians do his bidding in most satisfactory fashion. Chartock is building himself a real company.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 4, 1952

Rollicking 'Pinafore' Returns

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The new Gilbert and Sullivan company at the Hellinger last night added a double bill of "Trial by Jury" and "H. M. S. Pinafore" to its growing Savoyard list.

Like its predecessors this show has a fresh, bright production, and sweet, clear, soaring voices, as well as some expert veteran talents for its comic aspects.

It is really in the second act of "Pinafore" that the troupe shows what it can best do with this sort of program. There the plot thickens, the songs brighten and the opportunities for dance and cavorting are plainer, and most agreeably taken advantage of.

Five Encores.

When Martyn Green as the Admiral, Frank Rogier as the Captain and Lillian Murphy as Josephine sang the trio "Let the Air With Joy Be Laden," last night's audience demanded five encores, and this was as it should be. The number was bright and gay, and Green kept elaborating and enchanting it with his varied methods of ringing bells.

This number is preceded by Josephine's "Oh, God of Love," which is the evening's first outright bravura singing, and is followed in rapid succession by the amusing "What Was That?" the stirring "He Is an Englishman" and Buttercup's eloquent "Many Years Ago," which winds up the satirical plot so neatly.

Acoustic Difficulties.

"Trial by Jury" is a throwaway of pure nonsense, and fun only if you can follow every word. The company does its best, but the Hellinger is quite a barn to fill vocally with subtle jokes and feminine rhymes. The curtain raiser introduced in principal roles Audrey Dearden and Earl William, both expert members of the group.

"The Pinafore" begins a trifle limply, but the company will undoubtedly cure this impression as it gets more used to the work. This opera brings out added talents in familiar performers. Lillian Murphy is more exquisitely lyrical, sure and dainty, than she has ever been before.

Robert Rounseville, the troupe's leading tenor, plays Ralph with real humor and sings beautifully. Frank Rogier continues to impress, entirely on the credit side, with his ringing voice and stern demeanor.

Of the older hands at the G. and S. repertory, Martyn Green, with his fleet toes and tongue once more sparkles in the chief comedy role, and Ella Halman is lusty and dramatic as the immortal Buttercup. Joseph Macauley, now Deadeye Dick, is of literally inestimable value to a company like this, for his style and imaginativeness, and Radley Flynn, another D'Oyly Carte alumnus, makes hay with the part of the "Trial by Jury" Usher, a showier comedy role than most he has had.

Journal American

November 4, 1952

Fine Cast Needs Only Experience

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT IS a secret certainly to nobody that S. M. Chartock is operating a Gilbert and Sullivan Company at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, offering a repertory of the old favorites and receiving applause on all sides. Last night they came up with a split bill, "Trial by Jury" and "H.M.S. Pinafore."

If you want criticism, which is the label under which this is written, I would restate my original estimate, that the company needs experience.

They have the invaluable services of Martyn Green, who knows as much about G. & S. as anybody alive today, they have the talents of Lehman Engel, as musical director, and an enthusiastic and capable cast of young Americans to take over the chores of the old D'Oyly Carte company. It will be only a matter of time until they reach the perfection of their predecessors.

Missed Cues

Last night they missed cues and occasionally blew dialogue; many of the scenes lacked the professional polish we have come to associate with the parent company. On the other hand I thought the costumes were improved, somehow I was more impressed with the scenery, and there was no doubt that the chorus was coherent.

These fledglings have been giving a performance every day and trying to learn three or four extra parts in their spare time and it's excusable if they occasionally wonder whether they are in a Japanese garden or aboard a British man-of-war. But the stuff is there—time and trial will do the job.

Watching all this, man and boy, one is impressed once more with the great genius of the two creators. "Trial by Jury" is the thinnest possible idea, a mild travesty on the judicial system, and "H.M.S. Pinafore" has a basic plot lacking the excitement of a dull day with Joe Palooka, yet there is such infinite charm in the music and lyrics and the delightful character delineation that we return year after year. Isn't it incredible that these masterpieces have remained unmatched since 1875?

Fine Voice

Last night's offering convinced me, repetitiously that Frank Rogier has about the most commanding voice in the company; he dominated the dual bill both as the Counsel for the Plaintiff and Captain Corcoran.

Earl William turned in a gratifying performance as the Defendant in "Trial" and Robert Rounseville was completely competent, though sometimes shaky, singing the Ralph Rackstraw role in "Pinafore."

And then, of course, there was Martyn Green; and Ella Halman singing "Poor Little Buttercup," and a fresh young voice belonging to somebody named Mary Roche.

But, primarily, there were two characters called Gilbert and Sullivan.

New York Herald Tribune

November 4, 1952

Gilbert & Sullivan

By WALTER F. KERR

MARTYN GREEN and his new Gilbert and Sullivan company set sail in "Pinafore" Monday night—on a double bill with "Trial by Jury"—and the sea air is clearly good for them all. There is a heartening advance in bounce and brio over the troup's initial offering, and, in spite of that nagging unseasoned quality which frays the trim edges every now and then, the organization at the Hellinger seems to be gathering steam.

Above all, Martyn Green has now made himself thoroughly at home in his new surroundings. As "The Learned Judge" in the slender one-acter which opens the program, he is quietly, and superbly, in charge. Moistening his lips, peering dimly over his glasses, teetering across the bench for a confidence to the jury, blowing a perky kiss to one of the prettier girls, and dabbing at moist eyes with the sleeve of his long robe, he is jauntily funny without any struggle at all.

And as the dyspeptic and enchantingly decrepit Sir Joseph Porter in "Pinafore," he is as brilliant as he ever was with the D'Oyly Carte. Here Mr. Green's antic vein is most completely under control. The humor comes from deep down, only very slyly asserting itself at Sir Joseph's aged, pompous, and very dry surface. A fastidious small gesture—the demurely elegant polishing of an eyeglass, the flick of a handkerchief to wave a subordinate aside—is permitted to tell the whole story, and even when Mr. Green takes to ringing imaginary bells in "Never Mind the Why or Wherefore" the comic business is still delicately, judiciously patterned.

In "The Mikado," this inventive comedian was having some trouble stretching the encores in order to show off all of his best devices. But Monday at the Hellinger, once he had taken off across the Pinafore's deck on his fabulously spry and spindly legs, he had no such problem. The audience was wide awake, and eager for every favor Mr. Green might be willing to bestow upon them.

The rest of the company is catching on, too. Robert Rounseville is much more comfortable in the gawky bravura of Ralph Rackstraw than in the posturings of Nanki-Poo. Though he still attacks a few of the songs as though he were husbanding his strength for some more strenuous performance, the furrowed brow and the "simple eloquence" of a common sailor suit him well, and he emerges an appealing figure.

Perhaps even more promising in this third venture of the new company is Frank Rogier. As Counsel for the Plaintiff in "Trial by Jury" Mr. Rogier is still having some trouble putting his heart into all of the necessary grimaces, and as the Captain of the Pinafore he struggles manfully, but fairly transparently, with the comic business of his second-act duet with Buttercup. But Mr. Rogier has an engaging solemnity which is going to come in very handy—by contrast with the Gilbertian absurdities he sings—once he learns to exploit it. And he is already vastly amusing in his high-minded "fie, fies" to his rebellious daughter, and in his downhearted complaint that he was once a very popular commander.

Ella Halman sings Buttercup with her usual tart style. Lillian Murphy is in exceptionally good voice as the lass who loves beneath her station and Joseph Macauley is a satisfyingly misanthropic Dick Deadeye.

The chorus work in the Chartock company remains fuzzy, though. It isn't that the lyrics aren't intelligible; they are as clear as Mr. Green promised us they would be. But they are totally without bite, without resonance, and the young men and women in the background continue to approach these passages as though they had never been intended to mean anything but had been conceived as purely musical exercises. The physical business in which they engage is similarly without definition. When, as the jury in the curtain-raiser, they turn to reading their newspapers every time the defendant attempts to plead his case, the movement is slovenly and without focus. Satirical points are blunted again and again, and the principals must work twice as hard to stand out sharply against their feeble and distracting "support."

But whatever reservations one may have about the slowly forming style of the troupe as a whole, "Trial By Jury" and "H. M. S. Pinafore" offer an opportunity to see Martyn Green at the top of his form. That's a treat not lightly to be dismissed.